

Duxbury Mariner

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## HINDSIGHT

## Rebecca Frazar Jr., Single Woman

By Jody Morgan

"There was a stir everywhere at that time on behalf of High Schools for girls," Mary Rice Livermore relates of the early 1840s; "when she came to Duxbury to teach in a small, co-educational private school. Although she does not name the citizens of the town who established the facility as an interim measure while Partridge Academy was under construction, a document from that period indicates that the location of that private school in a house built by a single woman was no coincidence. Yet nothing in Mary Livermore's description indicates that she knew of the connection.

On the surface, date-board research seems a straightforward enough matter. You simply have to search back through all the recorded deeds for the property until you find the original purchase of the house lot. In reality, leafing through ancient documents is more like losing yourself in a labyrinth than completing a commonplace clerical assignment.

In the case of the dwelling now numbered 56 St. George St., the building that housed Mary Rice Livermore's school, the process hit an apparent dead end with the sale of a lot of land matching the size of the current property for \$60 on May 13, 1829. The land had been deeded by Samuel A. Frazar to his unmarried sister, Rebecca. The oldest part of the house clearly dated from an earlier time. The main section fronting on the street could well have been crafted in 1829, but where, in that day, would a single woman have gotten the money to build such an elegant home?

The article published at the time the dateboard was finally granted notes that Rebecca Alden Frazar, named for her mother, had inherited a large sum of money from a prominent family for whom she had long acted as a "secretary/business agent." As a suggestion of

her independent attitude and claim to equal status in a male-dominated business world, Rebecca added "Jr." to her signature. The source of the bequest, however, was left unnamed.

Quite by accident, I came across the answer to the Rebecca Frazar puzzle, much as town historian Dorothy Wentworth probably had before me. The date of the bequest that allowed her to purchase a house lot in 1829 should have given me an adequate clue, but I failed to see the significance. In documenting the election of Samuel A. Frazar to the original board of trustees for Partridge Academy, I was much surprised to read in the will of the

served as a private school. Had Rebecca ever shared with her benefactor her desire to open a school? Had they discussed together a plan for educating Duxbury youth while the endowment for Partridge Academy grew to an amount sufficient to fully fund and maintain that project?

Clearly, Samuel Frazar, George Partridge's executor and one of five men named by Partridge to hold the Academy endowment in trust, might have known of his sister's desire to provide higher education for Duxbury students as soon as she was able to do so. The ell may have been Samuel's contribution to the plan. Dorothy Wentworth suggests that this structure was

that Rebecca Alden Frazar made at least one additional purchase from her brother before his death in 1838. The sale of pew #54, "broad aisle on the lower floor," in the Congregational Church of Duxbury is noted on April 8, 1835, for the sum of \$125 by Samuel A. Frazar, shipwright, to Rebecca Frazar, single woman.

Unfortunately, Rebecca Frazar Jr. never had the pleasure of witnessing Mary Rice's excellent and progressive management of her school. Rebecca died Nov. 7, 1840, at the age of 71. Justin Winsor notes that she left \$500 to the Pilgrim Society and quotes: "Warm in her friendship, and of a generous heart, the tears of the poor are her eulogy."

The house and school were left to her brother's two oldest daughters. Mercy, a single woman like Rebecca, had predeceased her aunt. Abigail, who had married Nathaniel Weston, took charge of the facility. Whether the school remained closed after newlywed Mary Rice Livermore transferred her pupils to the first class of Partridge Academy in 1845 is not known. On Sept. 18, 1866, Abigail sold the property to her brother, Amherst Alden Frazar, Boston merchant, for \$1,500. He in turn sold the house out of the family to George C. Prior for the identical sum in 1870.

Remarkable certainly in her day, Rebecca Frazar Jr. managed to build her dream house and begin a new career as headmistress of her own private school at the age of 60. A single woman who had a head for business and a determination to stand on her own in a time when higher education for women entailed teaching young ladies to paint and embroider, Rebecca was instrumental in offering Duxbury girls their first opportunity to enjoy a high school education identical to that of their male counterparts.



The two-story ell of the Rebecca Frazar Jr. House was the site of a private school taught by Mary Rice Livermore.

Honorable George Partridge: "Also, I give and bequeath to my trusty and benevolent friend Rebecca Frazar who has for many years lived in my family and taken prudent care of my property the sum of Nine Thousand Dollars in the six percent stock of the United States...."

Although George Partridge further gave to Rebecca the right to continue living in the portion of his house that had apparently long been her home, she elected instead to build a house of her own. Attached to the 1829 dwelling, which she financed with her inheritance, is a long ell that

probably on the property when Samuel Frazar first bought it from Nathan Samson and may have been the house left to Nathan in 1778 by his father, Ebenezer Samson.

In any case, the structure which provided classroom space on the second floor definitely predates the home to which it is attached. A kitchen staircase supplied interior access to the schoolrooms, while an exterior stair allowed the pupils to go in and out without tramping through the living space. A small fireplace heated the entire area dedicated to education.

The town records indicate